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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7238

INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 7124

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 9746

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL IMMEDIATE 5559

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 1680

RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 2700

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

RHMFISS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 001388

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/09/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR PREL PTER TH

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: TWELVE KILLED IN MOSQUE ATTACK

REF: A. BANGKOK 01320

1B. 07 BANGKOK 05991

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: In one of the most lethal recent acts of violence, gunmen on June 8 entered a mosque during evening prayers in Cho Airong District of Narathiwat province (bordering Malaysia) and killed 12 people. The killings follow a surge in violence that appears to have resulted from the May 29 Court announcement of its findings in an inquest into the 2004 crackdown on a demonstration in Tak Bai district (also in Narathiwat) that left over 70 people dead; the Court's decision seemed to favor security officials. Thai government officials told us they suspect the attackers were Malay Muslim insurgents; NGOs and others believe that they were militant Buddhists seeking revenge for recent attacks that targeted teachers and others in the South. Army Commander Anupong Paochinda quickly traveled to the South for consultations; Deputy Prime Minister Suthep intends to travel there in the coming days. The attack came as PM Abhisit was in Malaysia discussing southern Thailand with PM Najib.

12. (C) Comment: We do not entirely rule out the RTG's claim that unidentified Malay Muslim insurgents committed the attack; it is possible that insurgents sought to perpetuate a cycle of violence and derail any prospects for peace. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine insurgents carrying out such a brutal attack on people who would appear to be their constituents; barring evidence to the contrary, we believe that militant Buddhists represent the more likely suspects. Whomever the culprits may be, the attack appears certain to aggravate ethnic tensions and further set back the prospects for peace. End Summary and Comment.

MOSQUE MASSACRE IN DANGEROUS DISTRICT

13. (U) A group of unidentified gunmen opened fire in a mosque during evening prayers in Cho Airong district in Narathiwat province June 8, the same day Prime Minister Abhisit was in Malaysia discussing southern Thailand with PM Najib. The attack left 12 people dead and 10 injured. Narathiwat police and military officials told us that there were five to six attackers. According to the officials, the attackers were insurgents. Colonel Parinya Chaidilok, spokesperson for the Fourth Region Internal Security Operations Command, was

quoted by the daily newspaper Bangkok Post as denying that the perpetrators were affiliated with the government, but that by attacking a mosque the killers appeared to be trying to pin the blame on Thai security forces.

¶4. (C) Cho Airong is among the most violent districts in southern Thailand. We visited a small village in the district in 2007 (ref B) and noted a sense of high tension. The Buddhist villagers we met were heavily armed and had constructed bunkers alongside their homes to defend their enclave against possible attacks by Malay-Muslim insurgents. Several of the 20 or so people we met had lost limbs to the ongoing violence. General Naphon Boontub, Aide-de-Camp to Queen Sirikit and host for the trip, told us then that Buddhists in the area were making a last stand against insurgents in rural Narathiwat.

RECENT SURGE IN VIOLENCE

¶5. (SBU) The mosque attack follows several recent large-scale attacks in Narathiwat. Three people were killed and 26 were injured on June 7 in attacks in Narathiwat. AFP reported on June 9 that 29 people had been killed and 68 injured in attacks in southern Thailand during the last week. Among the dead are four teachers, one of whom was pregnant. The violence follows a May 29 reading of a Court's inquest into the deaths of 78 people following the break-up of a demonstration in Tak Bai district of Narathiwat in 2004 (ref A). The inquest appeared to be partial to security officials by including language that those who died "had been in the

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custody of officials who had performed their duties according to assigned responsibilities." Commentators predicted publicly that, despite the Court's seeming independence from central authorities, the ruling would cast doubt on the sincerity of the Thai government's efforts to bring peace and justice to the South. (Note: Widespread media reporting, which we cited in ref A, erroneously claimed that the Court's ruling cited provisions of Thailand's Emergency Decree; in fact, the ruling did not mention the Decree. End Note.)

¶6. (SBU) Another possible factor in the uptick in violence is the Thai government's success in late May in lobbying the Organization of the Islamic Conference to postpone a resolution on the situation in southern Thailand. Insurgents groups such as the Pattani United Liberation Organization have pushed for such a resolution which, if passed, would likely embarrass the Thai government by stating that a greater level of self-governance was needed in the South.

UNCERTAINTY OVER THE REASON BEHIND THE ATTACK

¶7. (C) Narathiwat Vice Governor Nipon Narapitakkul told us that he doubted that the recent attacks were related to the Tak Bai ruling. Rather, he believed that the attacks were part of ongoing insurgent activities and that the mosque had been targeted because officials were unable to enforce security in Cho Airong.

¶8. (C) Yala Vice Governor Grisada Boonrach told us that while there have been previous attacks on mosques in the three southern provinces, this was the first time that gunmen had opened fire directly on Muslim worshippers in prayer. Grisada predicted that the severity of the mosque attack would significantly impact the morale of southern Muslims. Grisada characterized the attack as the worst incident since insurgent violence began to increase significantly in 2004.

REVENGE FOR RECENT KILLINGS?

¶9. (C) Somchai Homlaor, a lawyer and Secretary-General of the Human Rights and Development Foundation, told us on June 9

his contacts in the South suggested that the attack had likely been conducted by an unspecified militant Buddhist group, possibly with support from paramilitaries or village defense volunteers, as payback for the recent suspected insurgent attacks. Somchai said the mosque killing may be a tipping point in the insurgency. The military could not control the security situation and had lost the confidence of local people in the South, Somchai said.

¶10. (C) The local office of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) told us that ICJ's southern contacts reported a wide range of rumors regarding the mosque attack. Many in the South believed that killings were the responsibility of a militant Buddhist organization seeking revenge for the recent uptick in violence. Our ICJ contact told us she and her sources were worried about the impact of the mosque killings, and characterized the incident as indiscriminate violence.

THAI GOVERNMENT WORRIED

¶11. (U) Thai Army Commander General Anupong Paochinda made an unplanned visit to the South on June 9 to discuss security with Fourth Army Commander Lt Gen Pichet Wisaijorn. The Bangkok Post that reported that Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban also planned to visit on June 13. The visit would be his second to the South in a little over two weeks.

¶12. (C) Colonel Werachon Sukondhapatipak, Director of the Royal Thai Army's (RTA) Foreign Liaison Division, characterized the attack as an act of terrorism; the indiscriminate nature of the killings broke from the previous pattern of targeted violence. The RTA suspected that insurgents conducted the attack in order to attract international attention. Werachon said Prime Minister Abhisit's June 8 visit to Malaysia had been successful in

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demonstrating cooperation between the two sides and may have prompted insurgents who opposed peaceful settlement of the conflict to resort to this escalation in order to demonstrate their opposition. Werachon also described the recent OIC decision to postpone action on a resolution on the South as a victory for the RTG that may have prompted the recent violence. Werachon disputed that the attack was an act of revenge, saying that the RTA did not believe the attack was religious in nature.

ENTWISTLE